

(U) Ask Zelda: Employee Uses Co-workers as Entourage

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice for SIGINTers on Workplace Issues

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(U) The below article is unclassified in its entirety. The question has been edited for brevity.



Hi Zelda,

I work with an employee with a disability who asks co-workers to do errands for him outside of work, even if it inconveniences them: take him to work on their day off, take him to the commissary because he doesn't want to go to the grocery store, asks "what are you doing this weekend" followed by "Good I need you to do X or take me to X."

At first people were willing to give him a hand, helping him with easy requests (such as Internet searches for stores in his area), but then it became apparent that he could do these things himself when he indicated he had redone their work (to find stores with better discounts).

Many employees feel that he is using them, and I have to agree. There are others in the office with similar disabilities, and although they may need help from time to time, for the most part they are self sufficient and don't ask you to give up family time to assist them with personal errands. We've learned in EEO classes that most people with disabilities want to be independent, and I see our other disabled employees doing as well as our non-disabled employees -- or even better -- when it comes to job performance, but this particular person seems to be exploiting his disability. How do we tell him that we are not servants to wait on him hand and foot?

- Not anybody's slave

Dear Slave,

All I can say is **O.M.G.**

I applaud you and your officemates for being willing to help out your colleagues with disabilities, but am shocked that "Bruiser the User" is exploiting his co-workers in this way! Even the most sympathetic person would feel taken advantage of and unappreciated after what you've described [the original letter went into more detail]. You are not his personal assistants.

Some good advice in your situation comes from two of our wise First Ladies - Eleanor Roosevelt and Nancy Reagan. To misquote the former, "no one can take advantage of you without your consent."* You have the ability to put an end to the abuse. All you have to do is follow Nancy's guidance and **just say no.**

It's time to put your foot down. As Bruiser's co-worker, you are not obligated to chauffeur him around on your day off. Or pick up his Cheerios, his dry cleaning, or his mother when she comes to town.

Simply say, "I'm sorry but I have other plans." If you're going to the commissary anyway and can get him a specific/special item or two, that's great; but it's time to set some boundaries.

Now, you don't have to cut him off entirely. You can still be kind and courteous...even helpful; but decide what you are and aren't willing to do. Maybe you'd be OK running a few errands for him if he paid for the gas. Perhaps you wouldn't feel too put out if he limited his requests to one per month. Is there a favor he can do for you in return so the relationship isn't so one-sided? Feel free to put stipulations on your consent to help so you don't feel used.

If you decide you've had enough, that's OK, too. There are resources Bruiser can turn to for help. He's probably already aware of the Agency's office of Disability Affairs (**D64**). Suggest he contact them or other local organizations** that can put him in touch with volunteer and support groups. There are also errand services (sometimes called "concierges") in the area that act as personal assistants, which are easily found via a web search. (Sounds like you might be motivated enough to research that for him!)

Don't let this one demanding employee discourage you from helping out a friend in need. As you noted, most employees with disabilities want to be independent and treated the same as those without disabilities - which means not abusing the friendship of their colleagues.

Edda

* Eleanor's actual quote: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent."

** www.disabilityresources.org/MARYLAND.html is a helpful site for finding assistance.
